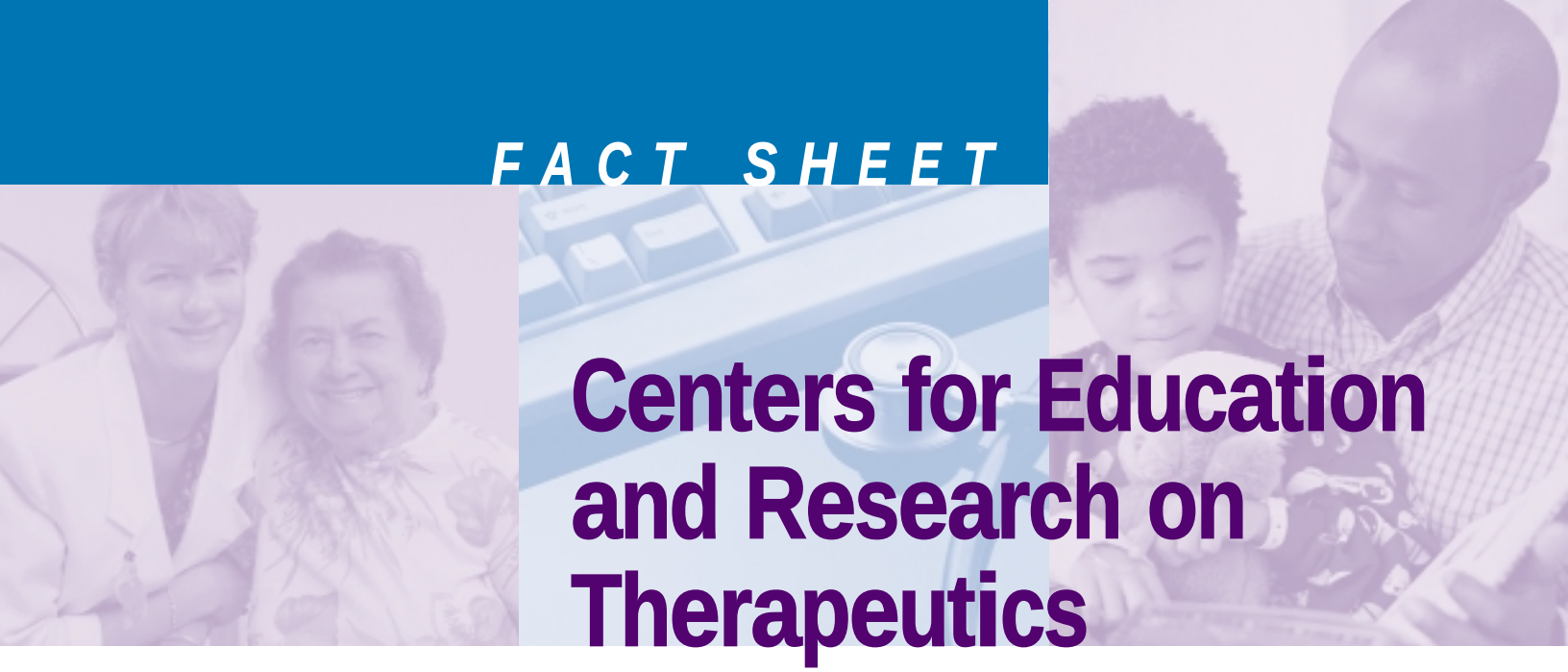
FACT SHEET



Centers for Education and Research on Therapeutics

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality • 2101 East Jefferson Street • Rockville, MD 20852

AHRQ is the lead agency charged with supporting research designed to improve the quality of health care, reduce its cost, address patient safety and medical errors, and broaden access to essential services. AHRQ sponsors and conducts research that provides evidence-based information on health care outcomes; quality; and cost, use, and access. The information helps health care decisionmakers—patients and clinicians, health system leaders, and policymakers—make more informed decisions and improve the quality of health care services.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Public Health Service

Background

The Centers for Education and Research on Therapeutics (CERTs) program is a national initiative to increase awareness of the benefits and risks of new, existing, or combined uses of therapeutics through education and research. The CERTs concept grew out of a recognition that physicians need more information about the therapies they prescribe. Although information is available through the pharmaceutical industry, continuing medical education programs, professional organizations, and peer-reviewed literature, comparative information about the risks and benefits of new and older agents and about drug interactions is limited.

Since 1992, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ, formerly the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research) has funded studies focused on patient outcomes associated with pharmaceutical therapy. Through this Pharmaceutical Outcomes Program, these grants addressed many important questions regarding the management of drug prescribing.

At the same time that medical products improve the lives of many patients, significant numbers of adverse events and inappropriate product use cause serious impairment to the health of others. Guidance on appropriate product use, prevention of errors and adverse effects, and cost-effective use of new and existing products is limited, indicating that health professionals need more comprehensive information about the drugs and biologics they prescribe and the devices they use and that practices associated with their use should be improved.

To address these issues, Congress authorized the CERTs demonstration program as part of the Food and Drug Administration Modernization Act of 1997. Because of its demonstrated expertise in pharmaceutical outcomes research, AHRQ was given responsibility for administration of the program. AHRQ awarded the first CERTs cooperative agreements in September 1999; the full CERTs program was made permanent in December of that year as part of the Healthcare Research and Quality Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-129).

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Purpose

The research conducted by the CERTs program has three major aims:

1. *To increase awareness* of both the uses and the risks of new drugs and drug combinations, biological products, and devices as well as of mechanisms to improve their safe and effective use.
2. *To provide clinical information* to patients and consumers; health care providers; pharmacists, pharmacy benefit managers, and purchasers; health maintenance organizations and health care delivery systems; insurers; and government agencies.
3. *To improve quality while reducing cost of care* by increasing the appropriate use of pharmaceuticals and biological products and devices and by preventing their adverse effects and the consequences of these effects (such as unnecessary hospitalizations).

CERTs Implementation

AHRQ implemented the CERTs program in September 1999 when it awarded initial 3-year cooperative agreements to support the first four Centers. In September 2000, three additional Centers were funded, bringing the total to seven. Each Center focuses on therapies used in a particular patient population or therapeutic area (see box).

Structure and Administration

Duke University coordinates CERTs activities among the seven Centers. There is a permanent steering committee composed of the CERTs principal investigators; representatives from AHRQ, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the National Institutes of Health; and three at-large members. Work groups of representatives from all of the Centers address broader issues related to the CERTs effort, such as quality of care and use of databases in research. AHRQ, in consultation with FDA, administers the CERTs program. AHRQ's Center for Outcomes and Effectiveness Research oversees the CERTs program and provides technical assistance and research support to the Centers.

For More Information

For more information on the CERTs program, visit the AHRQ Web site (www.ahrq.gov) or contact:

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Center	Emphasis
Duke University (U18 HS10548) Principal investigator: Robert Califf, M.D.	Approved drugs and therapeutic devices in cardiovascular medicine
Georgetown University (U18 HS10385) Principal investigator: Raymond Woosley, M.D.	Reduction of drug interactions, particularly in women
HMO Research Network (U18 HS10391) Principal investigator: Richard Platt, M.D.	Using large databases to study prescribing patterns, dosing outcomes, and policy impact for specific populations and diseases
University of Alabama (U18 HS10389) Principal investigator: Kenneth Saag, M.D.	Diseases associated with musculoskeletal disorders
University of North Carolina (U18 HS10397) Principal investigator: William Campbell, Ph.D.	Rational use of therapeutics in the pediatric population
University of Pennsylvania (U18 HS10399) Prinicipal investigator: Brian Strom, M.D.	Antibiotic drug resistance, drug utilization, and intervention studies
Vanderbilt University (U18 HS10384) Prinicipal investigator: Wayne Ray, Ph.D.	Prescription medication use in the Medicaid managed care population

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